# TANYA'S ISLAND

**Director Alfred Sole and producer Pierre Brousseau update 'Beauty & the Beast' with a modern sensuality.**

The alluring fashion model returns to the house she shares with Lobo. *Had* shared, actually, for Lobo has told her get out of his life. She wanders about disconsolately, looking at the objects she holds dear.

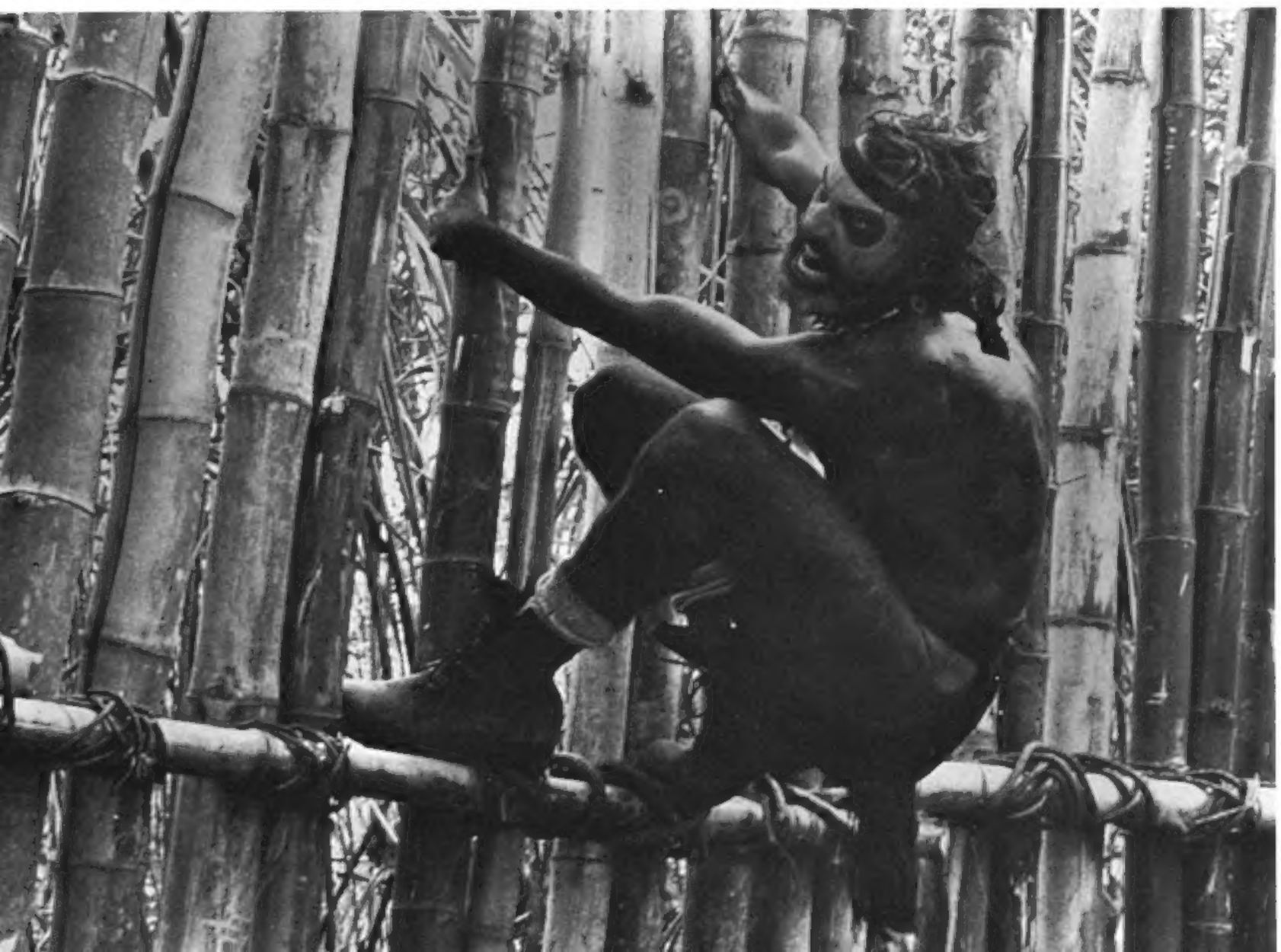
Gradually, odd noises begin to intrude on the soundtrack; sounds of a tropical paradise, the sounds of an ape. As she is drawn upstairs, the film stock shifts to a moody black and white. Heavy morning mist seeps under a doorway. The model picks up a conch shell which begins to glow. Then Tanya (D. D. Winters) walks down a long misty corridor, a slow motion entrance into a colorful island fantasy.

What happens on the island is as old as legends themselves: beautiful woman meets misunderstood beast. TANYA'S ISLAND (9:2:34) is certainly not the first attempt to film the story of Beauty and the Beast (see page 27), nor will it be the last. But director Alfred Sole, in his first outing since COMMUNION (released in America as ALICE SWEET ALICE) has fashioned an honest attempt to blend contemporary sexual and psychological overtones with the more traditional elements of the genre. Despite difficult shooting conditions and a small budget, this product of the burgeoning Canadian film industry boasts strong production values and one of the most convincing, technically sophisticated, beasts ever filmed.

Article by Jordon R. Fox

*Below: Tanya (D. D. Winters) flees with the Beast who has stolen her away from her lover, Lobo. Bottom: Lobo (Richard Sargent), enraged by Tanya's affection for the Beast becomes progressively more savage. Preceeding Page: Tanya signals her beast to come to her, perched precariously on the rock face of his deep cave open to the sky, a stunning Puerto Rican location.*

# TANYA'S ISLAND depicts what few 'Beauty & the Beast' films ever dared!



Most interestingly, director Sole and producer Pierre Brousseau have elected to depict what few (if any) serious Beauty and the Beast films have ever dared: what the beast *really* wants to do with his new found friend.

The TANYA'S ISLAND project, as yet unscheduled for U. S. release but set to debut in Canada in May, began with Brousseau as a marketing concept. Having spent the last six years with Filmplan International, a Canadian-based distribution company, Brousseau noted how certain films handled by Filmplan (including the EMMANUELLE films) did well without expensive promotional campaigns. Brousseau decided a film with a similar European flavor, exploitable sex ("sensuousness," he corrected) and a storyline paying *hommage* to two films he admired—Cocteau's BEAUTY AND THE BEAST and LORD OF THE FLIES—could be successful on the international market.

Brousseau took his story treatment to director Sole, whom he had worked with on a script years before, and whose COMMUNION was distributed in Canada by Filmplan. Though COMMUNION bombed commercially, Brousseau saw something in the film, and in Sole's work, that he liked. "People who really have talent," he said, "can show it when there's very little money to work with."

As with most projects, the script went through several changes between concept and celluloid. Apparently, the sexual references in the original version were too obvious for some—make-up wizard Rick Baker (KING KONG, INCREDIBLE MELTING MAN, STAR WARS) designed the Beast, but expressed reservations about getting involved fearing the film would get an X-rating.

A second draft written by Sole and Mick Garris was rejected for its pronounced tongue-in-cheek approach but a third draft hammered out in Canada by Sole, Brousseau and Rosemary Ritvo (who co-wrote COMMUNION) proved acceptable.

Tanya is a vulnerable model. She lives in Toronto with Lobo (Richard Sargent), a surrealist painter who abruptly ends the relationship, the shock of which sends Tanya drifting into an idyllic fantasy life with Lobo on an apparently uninhabited tropical island. But exploring a volcanic cavern, Tanya meets the island's third inhabitant: a baboon-like creature with bright blue eyes and a flowing mane who bears more than a slight resemblance to a character from one of Lobo's paintings. She passes out only to awaken on a bed of beautiful wildflowers obviously arranged for her. Placing one of the flowers in her hair, her fear is gone.

But the friendly Beast, with whom Tanya spends more and more time, is seen as a rival by Lobo. And so begins the role reversal between man and beast and the private war on the island for possession of Tanya. Boy meets girl meets ape. Boy loses girl. Ape gets girl. The lyrical fantasy turns into a nightmare, and at film's end the audience is left wondering exactly where reality ended and fantasy took over.

"The whole basis of the concept," said Brousseau, "is that this is not an animal,

*Below: Mime Don McCleod prepares to suit up as the Beast, and adjusts the cables which make the head mechanisms operate. Note the Beast's hands resting on the cliff face at left. Bottom: D. D. Winters and McCleod rehearse a scene with the camera operator, outfitted with a body harness to carry the Steadicam unit which simplified shooting in the rugged Puerto Rican locales.*

# 'Making a movie in Puerto Rico,' says Alfred Sole, 'is Apocalypse *manana!*'

a creature equal to man. Tanya was not at all involved with the ape on a sexual level, but that is all the man can see. He makes it impossible for her to befriend the animal. What we have is the violence of two worlds against the female, the weaker sex. At the end the ape rapes her because he has seen this is the way man treats the female. When the ape comes into contact with 'society,' the ape becomes more and more like man, just as the man becomes more like a beast."

Though the story is lyrical, production problems were brutal. Making TANYA'S ISLAND proved to be a study in doing without: without rudimentary things like tables and chairs, trailers for the crew (they ended up making crude shelters out of palm leaves) and even water or electricity at many locations. Much of the film was shot in the wilds of Puerto Rico, in areas unserved by roads or other such conveniences. Accomodations reserved for the production went instead to participants in the Pan-American Games, and most of the crew ended up rooming for 10 days at a sleazy, bug-infested motel (actually a brothel) until Brousseau managed to book a floor at a Hilton 50 miles away.

For director Sole, the lack of help from the newly formed and inexperienced Puerto Rican Film Commission meant more than just inconvenience. "I made a movie without seeing one foot of film!" he said. "We could not get dailies over there. I didn't even know if I was covered on half the stuff. I was just winging and shooting it. What'd I know? I'm used to shooting in Patterson.

"Making a movie in Puerto Rico," he said, "is Apocalypse Manana!"

A major factor in choosing Puerto Rico was a spectacular deep cave, partially open to the sky, with natural pools at the bottom. A natural choice for the Beast's lair, but even this decision caused problems. "The simplest thing, like the water source dripping into the cavern, became a special effect," said Sole. "That water was brought by hose over a mountain from the sea. It shows you the hardships the crew had in getting the basic minimum we would need."

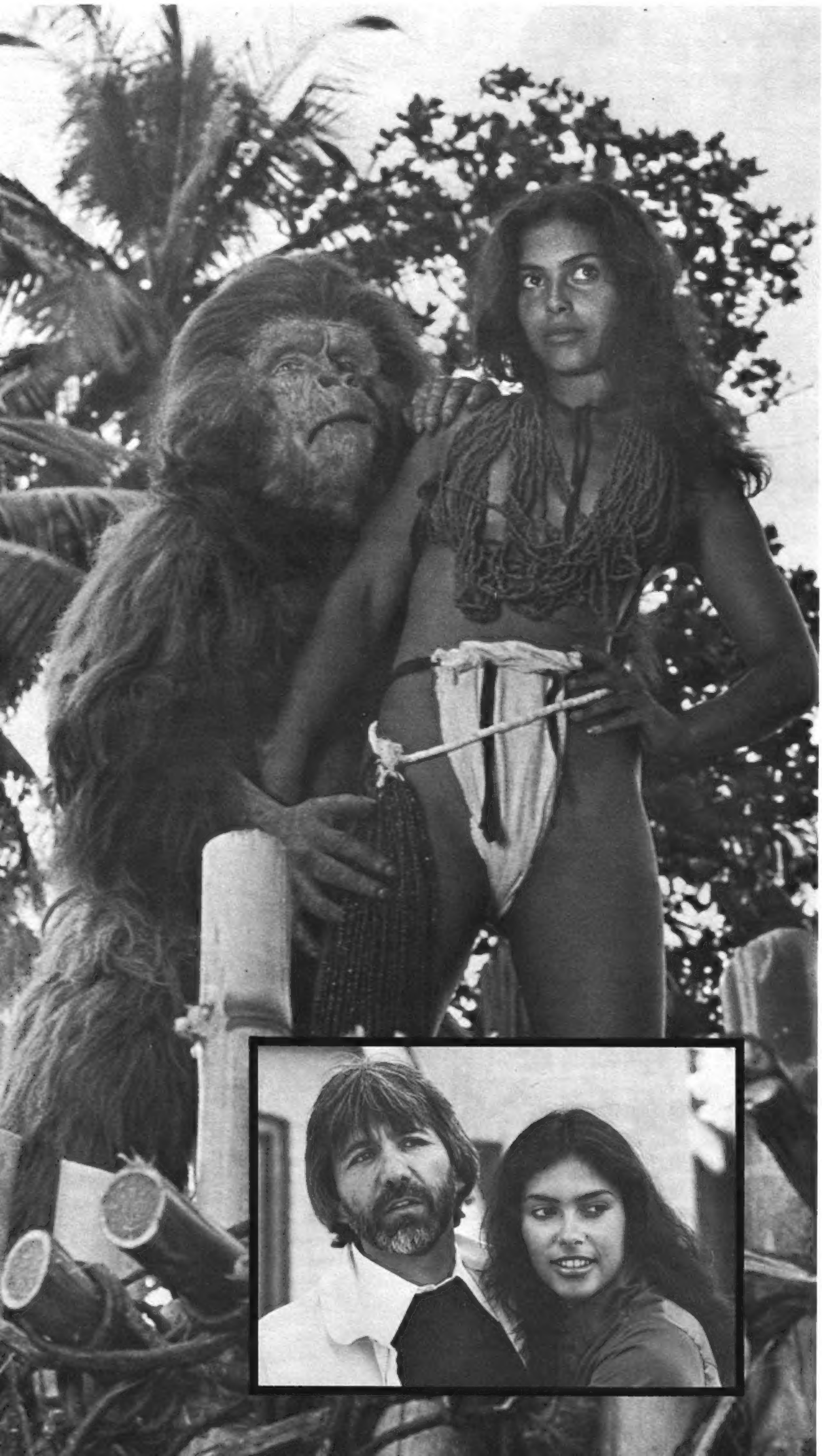
Equipment stranded when the DC10s were grounded cost Sole five shooting days. "Right off, I was into the script throwing pages away," he said. Scenes deleted helped explain why Tanya was leaving Lobo for the beast and helped make her situation on the island more clear. Even so, to get back on schedule 15-hour days became the rule.

Total disaster was only averted by two strokes of fortuitous planning. First was hiring David Cronenberg's (RABID, THE BROOD) regular crew, one of the top Canadian film crews, which relied on its cool professionalism in trying situations. The second was the early decision to shoot most of the film with a Steadicam, allowing Sole to negotiate a schedule that spared little or no rehearsal time and demanded 40 set-ups a day on rocky terrain.

If the crew had a hard time on the film, life for the cast was no picnic. D. D. Winters had to climb up the towering rock walls of the cavern and ride a horse as if born to the saddle, though she had never ridden before. "They risked their lives," said Sole, "riding along the edge of a cliff, doing things that if the horse turned the wrong way, it would have been all over—even for an experienced

*Right & Below: Tanya (D. D. Winters) and Blue (Don McCleod), her Beast. Make-up artist Rob Bottin who built the amazingly realistic costume, jokingly refers to the Beast as "your basic blond, blue-eyed, all-American surfer monkey." Bottom inset: Winters with TANYA'S ISLAND director Alfred Sole. Winters, a model, was cast after producer Pierre Brousseau spotted her in a magazine.*

**D. D. Winters, cast as Tanya, is soon to make all former '10s' obsolete.**



rider. We didn't realize it. We just had to do it, and we did it. At the end of a day it might sink in."

But the biggest risk was taken by mime Don McCleod, the man behind the mask (with McCleod's baby blues peering out from behind the suit, choosing a name for the Beast was simple: it was immediately dubbed Blue). McCleod passed out while filming a scene at the bottom of the isolated cave on a hot humid day. Struggling under heavy fur and rubber masks that made movement and breathing difficult ("Every time he ran more than 10 feet, he would stop and fall to his knees," said Sole. "You couldn't push him), McCleod nearly gave his life for the production.

"At the hospital they told us that two minutes more without oxygen to the skin—caused by the tightness of the rubber—and he would have died," said Brousseau. "Don took a chance on his own for the sake of the production, but it could have been lethal."

Lethal not only for McCleod, but for TANYA'S ISLAND as well. The film's creators agree that without the realistic portrayal of the beast there would be no film. And Sole and Brousseau spare no words in praising McCleod and Rob Bottin, who built and operated the suit with a series of short cables (see preceding page, and a previous technical article, 9:2:34).

"I loved that beast," said Brousseau. "There's no way in the world you could think this is not an ape, unless you consider that you are in a theater watching a movie. Don McCloud was so clever and so emotional, projecting only with movements and his eyes. You could care for that ape. It was not just a creature, it was a creature with feeling."

"Let's face it—it could have been a man in a monkey suit," said Sole. "If the Beast didn't work for the audience, there's no movie. It had to breathe, the lips had to move, it had to snore, had to blink its eyes. You *had* to buy it."

And what proportion of the film's $1 million budget went towards things simian? "Not very much," said Sole. "They [Bottin and McCleod] performed miracles on a shoestring. We had no second suit, no duplicates of anything."

While McCleod is the face behind the mask, a lamp was nearly the voice. Sole found what he wanted when he stumbled on the sound of a dying oil lantern—something halfway between a whisper and a growl. Though it sounded wonderful to the ear, it didn't record that way for technical reasons, and more conventional ape sounds (an actor's voice) were dubbed in later in Toronto.

But at least Sole got *most* of what he wanted. "What I wanted to achieve was a contemporary fairy tale," he said, "maybe taking it where BEAUTY AND THE BEAST was afraid to go. Right now I'm too close to judge. What does a girl say to a beast, anyway? It could have been silly. At least you don't laugh. I look at the film now not in terms of the film itself, but what we accomplished despite the production problems, things that were really rough but were made to work. Good or bad, the film works technically and cinematically. I feel good about that." □